

Media Specialists' Ascent to Leadership

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The role and expectations of media specialists have drastically shifted throughout the decades due to the advancement of technology, curriculum, and student achievement guidelines. Where media specialists were once thought of as clerical employees in charge of book checkouts, reshelving library materials, and on hand assistants for research when needed, the role has progressed to mean so much more. *Information Power* describes the new expectations of media specialists as:

The Library Media Specialist assumes a leadership role in gaining the administrative and financial support the program requires. Through collaborating with teachers and others to integrate the information literacy standards for student learning into the curriculum, the library media specialist establishes the program's central role in student learning and demonstrates the need for adequate support for the program's emphasis in teaching and learning in the acquisition and use of information technology. The library media specialist establishes and fosters relationships that lead to an understanding of the program and its goals (ALA, 1998, p.106).

The leadership responsibilities associated with media specialists require a transition from a passive role to one that is exceptionally active in the school community. By providing instructional resources to teachers,

collaborating on curriculum planning, and facilitating professional developments, media specialists can establish themselves as curriculum leaders in the eyes of administration. Collaborating with instructional partners to educate students on how to access, evaluate, and use technology to gain information relating to their curriculum identify media specialists as technology leaders as well. When media specialists assume these leadership roles, student achievement increases, asserting school library media specialists as fundamental parts of the school and its success. This success can influence the media center's budget and their influence within the community.

Curriculum Leaders

When media is integrated into the learning process rather than supplemental to it, curriculum leaders arise. The expectations of media specialists as curriculum leaders are defined in *Information Power* and include: join teachers and others to identify links across student information needs; develop policies, practices, and curricula that guide students to develop the full range of information and communication abilities; work closely with individual teachers in the critical areas of designing authentic learning tasks and assessments; and work closely with teachers to integrate the information and communication abilities required to meet subject matter standards (Vansickle, 2000, p.8).

These roles rely on successful collaborations with instructional staff. Media specialists who understand the curriculum and their collections can ensure effective partnerships. In *Resource-Based Teaching*, subcategories of different competencies media specialists should grasp are defined. They include media, curriculum, management, and human relations. Within curriculum, media specialists must:

- Identify sources from which curriculum material is derived
- Analyze goals and assumptions embedded in major current orientations, particularly that of curriculum as technology
- Adopt the theory of process and design of curriculum to local school systems
- Apply system theory to the development of curriculum (Ray, 1994, p.25)

Once this is accomplished, media specialists must establish a vision and develop a media program centered around the support of the instructional curriculum. To assist with this vision, they can create curriculum and collection maps (Krueger, 2015, p.22). These maps organize resources into subjects, a method of departmentalizing (Moran, 2017, p.176). All materials pertaining to the curriculum and its standards are gathered allowing easy access to resources for instructional and support staff. Media specialists can also utilize these maps to determine how often material is used and decide to purchase new curriculum or promote the current collection already in the media center. It is the responsibility of the

media specialist to conduct this research and relay the information to the staff. Curriculum committees are an effective way of achieving this as they provide opportunities to collaborate with staff to design and implement relevant lessons that meet school standards, accompanied by media collections. This prevents the media center from being seen as a separate entity outside of the school, but instead as an important part of the learning community. Once administration recognizes this impact, budgets can increase for new collection materials or technology to enhance the curriculum standards and instructional experience.

Technology Leaders

Developing relationships with instructional partners does not end with gathering curriculum materials. Curriculum integration infused with the use of technology enables a “tool to enhance the learning in a content area or multidisciplinary setting” (Johnston, 2015, p.18). The integration of technology into classrooms, rather than the simple promotion of it, is another responsibility of media specialists that has developed over the decades. As the roles continue to transform, as do the titles of media specialists. Most of the time, they are considered technology specialists as well; as technology use has become more advanced and integrated into core curriculum. Other titles include, “technology coach,” “technology facilitator” and “technology coordinator,” all indicating proficiency in the technology (Johnston, 2015, p.18). As media specialists are the leaders of media in their media centers, it is their duty to promote and educate on the

use of technology. These technologies include but are not limited to laptops and desktop computers, charging carts for laptops, interactive whiteboards, and overhead projectors. However, media specialists are also expected to be adept in technology programs as well. Some examples are Microsoft Office suite, SMART Ideas, Inspiration, global positioning systems (GPS), and virtual reality (Ball, 2010, p. 30).

Certain states require students to show progress in “21st century skills”, and mandate schools to provide professional developments for teaching professionals (Johnston, 2015, p.24). These skills determined by the American Association of School Libraries (2007) in the *Standards for 21st Century Learners* encourage students to: 1. Inquire, think critically, and gain knowledge, 2. Draw conclusions, make informed decisions, apply knowledge to new situations, and create new knowledge, 3. Share knowledge and participate ethically and productively as members of our democratic society, and 4. Pursue personal and aesthetic growth. Students are then encouraged to apply these standards in real-life scenarios. Technology instruction with students is a major task of the media specialist. Understanding how to properly seek out information permits students to develop responsible behaviors and achieve what is called “digital citizenry” (Ball, 2010, p. 27).

Partnering alongside administration, library media specialists recommend and advocate for technology purchases to ensure the information needs and technology needs in and out of classrooms are being

met. Studies have shown that initiating for one-to-one laptops, meaning one laptop per student, reduced discipline problems among students and led to lower dropout rates and therefore higher rates of college attendance compared to schools that did not have this initiative (Ball, 2010, p.39). However, this was only true when students were taught by teachers and media specialists how to use laptops appropriately. By receiving laptops and being properly instructed on how to gain knowledge safely and effectively, media specialists prepare learners to succeed and actively participate in future society.

A number of media specialists are implementing technology learning centers into their media centers to create a learning common to further achieve this success. This merging of classroom teachers and library media specialists is used as a lesson to students in collaboration and teamwork. It also provides a stress-free environment into the digital world with technology access to assist with research and other assignments. Many studies have shown a positive correlation between effective instructional collaboration and student digital citizenry to higher student success.

Student Achievement

In a study of media specialists who collaborate with teachers, teach information skills, and implement a library plan that correlates with the curriculum, student reading assessment scores have increased. In a Colorado students assessment test, the fourth-grade class scored 18%

higher than in previous years (Church, 2008, p. 4). In a study conducted by Loertscher, schools with media specialists as curriculum and technology leaders reported an 85-100% success rate (Loertscher & Zepnik, 2019, p. 42). One report from a participating classroom teacher stated:

“Collaborating with the teacher librarian was essential. She had the knowledge and materials to lead students through the bookmaking process and the time outside of regular class meetings to provide students with a space to complete their projects” (Loertscher & Zepnik, 2019, p. 43).

Media Specialists can gather their own data on student reading achievements through library programs as well. Reading counts challenges, summer reading challenges, and Accelerated Reader allow teachers, administration, and media specialists to monitor and track student’s independent reading practices. Using diagnostic tools and reports to convey results of the programs can aid in identifying students’ strengths and weaknesses. Instructional staff can then prepare guidelines for maximum student success.

Ensuring student achievement not only comes from an instructional standpoint, but a supportive one. Media specialists cooperate with non-instructional staff as well to ensure student success outside of the classroom; ultimately resulting in success within the classroom by collaborating with school counselors to aid students struggling with mental

health. School counselors share information with the media specialist regarding the mental health issues facing students, and in turn the media specialist works with the students to identify useful and relevant resources on their identified mental health or social issues (Dotson-Blake & Dotson, 2011, p. 202). As students already have a relationship or familiarity with their school media specialist, the two can coincide with the counselor to develop a program to effectively address the student's needs. Ensuring students are mentally fit potentially guarantees their fit academically as well to take on new learning challenges and lessons. The media specialists cooperate with instructional and non-instructional staff to ensure students achieve success in school and in future society.

Demonstrating Leadership Abilities

With student success directly correlated with proactive media specialists, administrative staff should recognize the importance of a well-funded media. However, many principals do not understand the range of services provided by the media center and its media specialists. The *School Library Journal* published data from a survey conducted on 242 principals from around the country. This survey discovered that 47% of principals acknowledge a correlation between the media center and student success, and only 41% acknowledged the direct effect media centers had on student assessment scores (Church, 2008, p. 7). This data showed that less than half of the principals surveyed saw media specialists as leaders vital to their success. In *Instructional Role*, Campbell insisted on this idea of a strong

relationship between both principal and media specialist. He proposed four ways the principal can affect the success of the media center. These ways are: principals must clearly understand the role and purpose of the school library media program in the context of the entire school; must set high expectations for the program; must support the program through personal commitment and sufficient funding; and must communicate to teachers and students the importance of the program (Church, 2008, p. 5).

Classroom teachers are also critical in the success and participation of students in the media center as they can influence students to use its resources. However, they too are unaware of what programs and resources the media center has to offer. A survey conducted of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, or NCATE, found that 75% of programs do not include information on media programs in their classes (Church, 2008, p.8). The federal government, nor the standards in the educational leadership field, acknowledge media specialists as leaders in student education.

The leadership qualities associated with media specialists must be addressed to administration and instructional staff by the specialists themselves. This initiative to demonstrate themselves as school leaders requires effective communication with the staff. *In Today's School Librarian Leader*, ten ways to show leadership are addressed. These ten include: 1. Meet regularly with your principal, 2. Attend all faculty meetings, 3. Serve on curriculum and standards committees, 4. Present professional

development for teachers and librarians, 5. Engage in collaboration with teachers and technology staff, 6. Meet with school library colleagues, 7. Visit other school libraries, 8. Link to initiatives are implemented on your campus or in your district, 9. Give recognition to others for their successes, 10. Attend and participate in district, state, and national association meetings and conferences (Dees, 2007, p. 12).

For media specialists who do not understand their roles as leaders or know how to achieve these leadership standards, curriculum is available. The Florida State College of Information funded the LEAD program, an initiative developed to provide graduate education opportunities for school library media specialists. Students in this program learn how to embrace their roles as leaders in technology, reading, and instruction (Dees, 2007, p. 13). Media specialists are responsible for taking these programs and initiating conversation with their administrative and instructional staff.

Conclusion

Laura Bush quoted, "Studies show that a well-staffed, well-funded, well-stocked school library means higher test scores, " but to create them "school librarians must be active leaders in their schools" (Everhart, 2007, p. 57) Media specialists have a unique opportunity to cooperate with students, administration, and staff to create a positive impact and become valuable assets to their schools. They serve as leaders through their knowledge of school curriculum, technology expertise, and collaborative

experience. However, to achieve this they must communicate with school staff and administration about their roles and the resources and programs offered in the media center. It is also the responsibility of the media specialist to promote their skills and partnerships and maintain open communication with administration to influence budget allocation. The myriad of roles and responsibilities required to become leaders in their school is a challenge media specialists must undertake for the overall success of their school.

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